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The Pathfinder

OCTOBER, 1906

Thomas Chatterton

By EDWIN WILEY

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Among papers that have appeared in THE REVIEW and have attracted wide attention, the following may be mentioned: *National Life and Character*, by Hon. Theodore Roosevelt; *What Becomes of Our Trade Balances?* by W. H. Allen; *An Academic Sermon*, by Professor W. P. Trent, etc., etc.

Address

THE SEWANEE REVIEW
Sewanee, Tennessee

The Pathfinder

A monthly magazine in *little* devoted
to Art and Literature

†

GLEN LEVIN SWIGGETT, *Editor*
SARAH BARNWELL ELLIOTT }
CURTIS HIDDEN PAGE } *Associate Editors*
EDWIN WILEY }

TIT is planned to be the meeting-place for those who care for the beautiful and permanent things in art and literature; where one may find, selected carefully from the writings of the master-minds of the past, their best thoughts and appreciations of these things; and where the man of to-day, whether scholar, poet, or artist, may give expression to his love for and abiding faith in those personalities, institutions, and things that reflect a serious purpose and lofty ideal.

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GLEN LEVIN SWIGGETT, *Editor*
SARAH BARNWELL ELLIOTT
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EDWIN WILEY } *Associate Editors*

Contributions are invited from all lovers of good books and high ideals in literature, art and life. The editors disclaim responsibility for the opinions of contributors.

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COLLEGE FRIENDSHIPS

THESE verses were written by President CHARLES CUTHBERT HALL, and read at the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Delta Psi Fraternity at Williams College.

They express the faith, held by many in common with the author, in the continuity beyond the years of the real friendship of souls. The message will be a stimulus and consolation to all to whom it comes.

As a piece of bookmaking, the volume is the best that has come from *The Sewanee Press*. The type used is the beautiful Caslon, and the paper is "Arches" French hand-made. It was dampened before printing and the sheets were afterwards smoothed in the dry-press. There is a touch of antique red on the title-page and the colophon is likewise rubricated. Otherwise the volume is without decoration, making its appeal through its dignified simplicity.

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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
OF SEWANEE TENNESSEE

The Pathfinder

Vol. I]

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[No. 4]

PRELUDE DE CHOPIN

By WILBUR UNDERWOOD

Still in the shadows of the twilit room
Dreamy with ghostly scent, I see you play;
While muted voices dark with sense of doom
Weep out their hope; the dim notes die away
Like echoes in the caves of endless pain,
And then once more begin their phantom plaint
That shivers though the soul like dripping rain —
So cold is life, so very sad and faint —

Still do I see you play — your weary face,
Your sombre eyes grown deep with old despair;
Your wistful soul that ever yearns to trace
Some pathway through th' illimitable air;
Hushing to hear in dumb expectancy
The things time gathers from eternity.

THE HEROIC COUPLET

By EDWARD PAYSON MORTON

Pope loquitur :

That man must practice to be clear and terse,
 Who'd phrase his thoughts in rhym'd heroic verse :
 He may not wander aimlessly, or tell
 His story loosely, if he'd do it well ;
 The thrilling danger and th' heroic act
 Alike deserve and call for verse compact.
 To give the lofty thought its fitting shrine
 Demands a mastery of th' iambick line ;
 Genius alone can give the vital touch,
 But precept, with hard practice, may do much.

T' avoid gross errors, learn to keep the rules,
 From ripe experience gather'd, not the schools.
 If you would have a strong and vig'rous line,
 Use single rhymes, avoid the feminine ;
 In lyric verse such rhymes set nerves a-tingle ;
 But in th' heroic, you get only jingle.
 Strong rhyme's not all ; the poet knows to join
 Clear, polish'd syntax in the flowing line.
 Antithesis, or balance, serves to bring
 The point into the last word, like a sting.
 If what you'd say will not to that be brought,
 Think farther, harder, till your hare you've caught ;
 Then dress him in antithesis, for it,
 Like curry, oft conceals the lack of wit !

Spare not to polish : "labor of the file"
 Alone will yield an artless-seeming style.

The couplet is a unit ; long enough
 For him who knows its syllables to stuff.
 The novice finds it a Procrustes' bed,

And fears his thought, too long, will lose its head ;
But if the wholesome truth must be confessed,
His thoughts will show more vigor, if compress'd.

Avoid the triplet, therefore ; 'tis for those
Who, like Titanic Dryden, in their throes
Find freedom only in heroic overflows.



WITH A VOLUME OF POEMS

By LEWIS WORTHINGTON SMITH

Loving the old,—

Happy with Chaucer making pilgrimagge,
With Spenser fanciful, with Shakespeare free,
The warmth of my delight has harborage
For all the life and glow they bring to me,
The bards of old.

Loving the new,—

Filled with the promise of a larger day
And fuller-throated song with passing years,
The thrill of joy brings all my life to May
Till rapture overflows in sudden tears
For all things new.

STUDIES IN ENGLISH ROMANTICISM:
THOMAS CHATTERTON

By EDWIN WILEY

Old Samuel Johnson puffing up the steep stairs of St. Mary Redcliffe to view the chest in which Chatterton claimed to have found the Rowley poems is one of the cleverest bits of irony that time has so far bequeathed us. The Augustan Age was one of hard materialism and unfaith, but, as is not seldom the case, it was an age of ghost-seeing as well, and the Great Doctor had directed all of his energies against such superstition. With his own burly fist and Rabelaisian "poof" he had put the Cock Lane and other specters to flight; England was purged of them all save one, the wraith of Thomas Rowley.

Now Thomas Rowley was a monk that haunted the church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and also the person of the mad boy, Chatterton, who had foolishly written rhymes, and had been starved into suicide for his pains. Some had seen fit to defend the lad and his ghosts, but the good Doctor would have none of it; Rowley, Canyng and the other wraiths must be everlastingly laid! So he and Bozzy climbed to the muniment room,

peeped into the worm-eaten chests, heard Chatterton's sisters tell the boy's story, and then climbed down again, the Doctor shaking his head thoughtfully and murmuring to Boswell that "This is the most extraordinary young man that has encountered my knowledge."

Nor was the ghost of Rowley laid, for since that time the world has been shaking its head and repeating the old Doctor's words. Indeed, this was a far more extraordinary young man than he had suspected, for through the doorway of the muniment room of St. Mary, Thomas Chatterton, then twelve or fourteen years of age, entered into a world of faëry, the portal to which had been closed since Shakespeare freed Ariel and his elves. Whether or not he found any old manuscripts which served as the basis for the Rowley poems is beyond the question, for the value of his gift to the world is so transcendent that we can well afford to overlook a bit a deception for which he was not wholly to be blamed. Let it be known that here was the first of that galaxy of young genius that was to sweep artifice and materialism from the world of men. The spiritual ancestor of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, he was the first to find again the art and the poetry of the Gothic times, the spell

of Chivalry, the glamour of “Old, unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago.”

The environment of Chatterton offers no clue whatsoever to the mystery of his genius; nor, indeed, does heredity offer much more. His ancestors for a century and a half had been the sextons of St. Mary’s, and though his ancestral line was far longer and doubtless more respectable than many a member of the Bristol aristocracy, yet a grave-digger cannot claim a coat of arms, however ancient his lineage, nor is a great poet expected to spring from such loins. It is true, however, that the poet’s father had forsaken his birthright and had adopted the more respectable profession of schoolmaster, yet the records we have of him are far from reassuring. That he drank, we know, which was bad; that he sang in a choir, we also know, which was worse. Yet, barring hereditary influences, Chatterton’s father was no active force in his life, for he had been dead three months when the boy was born.

When he was six years old his mother was greatly distressed at his apparent stupidity. She taught a group of little boys and girls whose aptness in learning was in great contrast with her own child, who alternated between cause-

less tears and idle mooning. She did not see that this was but his chrysalis stage, and the awakening that soon came astonished her quite as much as the other, for it came in a very strange way. His father had bound up some sheets of choir music in vellum that he had taken from the chests in the church. That they were not his, and that they were perhaps valuable did not concern the good singer in the slightest—he found them useful, and he took them with casual thanks. The lad's eyes were caught by the brilliant colors of the illuminated initials, and soon he was busy in his own little garret-room striving to imitate the old letters by means of bits of tinted chalk. Soon he unearthed an ancient black-letter Bible, in which in a very short while he had learned to read. It is typical of the temper of his mind that he would never read any other version of the Scriptures.

Thus Chatterton found his world; the antique missals, the quaint words and uncouth phrases of the old Bible were the things his soul had been yearning for, and because of them the Gothic church, with its filmy spire, the old tombs, with their mysterious inscriptions carved upon them took, on a quality of life unguessed

by his matter-of-fact neighbors, and soon his childish fancy began to weave glamourous legends about these things.

The mystery of Chatterton's precocious genius is explained solely by the psychology of childhood. The poet Wordsworth in his marvellous *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* hints at a fact that Chatterton incarnates. The child is in close touch with the spiritual, or, better, a spiritual world; not yet materialized by practical realities, he creates a world of dream, the basis of which is slight beyond apprehension. Yet it is a world none the less real to the child himself; he visualizes the scenes born in his fancy until they seem more real than the trees, the rivers, and the hills around him, creating men and women with whom he holds communion far more intimate than that with his play-mates, often, even, than his father and mother.

Now grant a boy, in whom this universal characteristic is magnified to an immeasurable degree, whose inward life is so entirely distinct from his outward, an extraordinary power of expression, and the result is a Chatterton. This fact, too, explains the prophetic quality of his genius. Had his development been less subjective, and had his expression come after his schooling

and the life of his time had moulded him, Chatterton would not to-day stand as the earliest spirit of the romantic revival. His poetic *credo* owed nothing to his age, nor, indeed, was it the result of any rational procedure whatsoever—he had found some old manuscripts in a worm-eaten chest, some quaint tombs in a shadow-haunted church, and glooming over these things, he dreamed a dream, and at last he found the words to tell it to the world.

However much Thomas Rowley was a myth to Horace Walpole and the ghost-hunting Doctor Johnson, he was no ghost to the boy Chatterton, and we will do him most justice by accepting the reincarnation of the monk. He was the lad's familiar spirit, with whom he trod the cloistered past, saw the knightly Canyng ride at the head of his troop across the stone bridge flung over the Avon, and though their speech as he records it has not found the approval of learned philologists, yet we should vastly err in calling Chatterton a common charlatan.

Indeed his deception was cloaked upon him by his very genius and his muddle-headed generation. His friends, like all friends from the very beginning of days, could not be brought to

believe that this youngster from the charity school was capable of writing "reel literatoor." They preferred to be most outrageously gulled first. And so when Catcott, the town pewterer, desired a family-tree, Chatterton unearthed one from his magic chest, the roots of which bit down even to the Norman Conquest; and when Barrett, the local historian, desired to learn the deeds of the mediæval citizens of Bristol, the boy supplied him lavishly with rare and thrilling recitals of bold knight and faire ladye. The fact that some things are true adds no virtue to them; conversely, the fact that Chatterton's legends were untrue takes none away from them.

The truth is, it was Chatterton's pride that had much to do with producing these plays of spirit. He saw how manifestly impossible it was to make these people understand his real worth, so like Will Shakespeare in Stratford, beside the other Avon, he purposed to give them a taste of his quality before he kicked up his heels for London.

Anyhow to London he went, and there he found the door of opportunity still more firmly closed. Like most martyrs, he was either born too soon, or too late, and so he perished—the youngest sacrifice to the oldest cause. Who

can read beneath those cheery words that he wrote back to his mother and his sister in Bristol, and behold the slow breaking of a heart of genius? Who knows what demoniac forms the visions of Rowley and Canyng assumed in those weeks of bitter conflict with unkind conditions, and still more unkind men? This much we do know that this most charitable world drove a boy of genius, Thomas Chatterton, into misanthropy, atheism, despair and suicide at the age of eighteen. It was not the first time this sort of thing had happened; it would be supererogation to assert that it was the last.

Nevertheless it was during the black days and nights that preceded his death that he found the heart to write that splendid lyric, *The Excellent Ballad of Charity*—clearly the first utterance of a mood that found its ultimate expression in the poetry of Coleridge, Keats, Rossetti and Morris. Here and there is a note that rings of *Christabel* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and yet there is an element that both Coleridge and Keats lacked: a treatment of nature that is objective, but passionate at the same time. All of his world-weariness was a weariness with men and their injustice; his tender child-heart sobbed for the healing and solace of nature. Rarely save in

The Canterbury Tales and Shakespeare's romantic plays do we find this mood so keenly voiced.

The sun was gleaming in the mid of day,
Dead still the air and eke the welkin blue,
When from the sea arisit in drear array
 A heap of clouds of sable sullen hue,
The which full fast unto the woodland drew,
Hiding at once the Sunnè's festive face ;
And the black tempest swelled and gathered
 up apace.

Beneath an holme, fast by a pathway side
 Which did unto Saint Godwyn's convent lead,
A hapless pilgrim moaning did abide,
 Poor in his view, ungentle in his weed,
 Long breast-full of the miseries of need.
Where from the hailstorm could the beggar fly?
He had no housen there, nor any convent nigh.

Look in his gloomèd face; his sprite there scan,
 How woe-begone, how withered, sapless, dead !
Haste to thy church-glebe-house, accursèd man,
 Haste to thy coffin, thy sole slumbering-bed !
 Cold as the clay which will grow on thy head
Are Charity and Love among high elves ;
The Knights and Barons live for pleasure and
 themselves.

Chatterton's love for nature was no blind adoration, but was grounded in a profound knowledge of her infinite phases. The idle hours spent on the grass in the St. Mary's church-yard, gazing at the tree-tops rocking back and forth against the blue, listening with ardent ears to the twi-

light call of the rooks, or the twitter of the swallows as they circled around the lace-work, taught him many things. Boy though he was, his was the artist's vision, and his the power to transcribe the thing that he saw.

The budding floweret blushes at the light:
The meads are sprinkled with the yellow hue;
In daisied mantles is the mountain dight;
The slim young cowslip bendeth with the dew;
The trees enleafèd, into heaven straught,
When gentle winds do blow, to whistling din are
brought.

Like Keats and Rossetti, Chatterton was swayed by the feeling for beauty, yet he had another quality that Rossetti partly, and Keats wholly lacked — a deep sympathy for those who toiled and suffered. The renunciation and the anguish of his own quest gave a sterner something to his poetry which now rises to heights of splendid irony, and again descends to misanthropy so bitter that one is tempted to think that it is more a pose than the expression of a genuine emotion. One, indeed, questions whether it be not composed in good part of childish wilfulness and petulance. Nevertheless his words show that he neither evaded the issues nor accepted the abuses of his own times. That the words

are not always sane nor well-advised does not militate against their essential justice.

When civil power shall snore at ease;
 When soldiers fire—to keep the peace;
 When murders sanctuary find,
 And petticoats can justice blind;
 Look up, ye Britons! cease to sigh,
 For your redemption draweth nigh.

Commerce o'er bondage will prevail,
 Free as the wind that fills her sail,
 When she complains of vile restraint,
 And Power is deaf to her complaint;
 Look up, ye Britons! cease to sigh,
 For your redemption draweth nigh.

What strange infatuations rule mankind!
 How narrow are our prospects, how confined!
 With universal vanity possest,
 We fondly think our own ideas best;
 Our tottering arguments are ever strong;
 We're always self-sufficient in the wrong.

Has thou ne seene a tree uponne a hylle,
 Whose unliste braunces rechen far toe syghte;
 Whan fuired unwers doe the heaven fylle,
 Itte shaketh deere yn dole and moke affryghte.
 Whylest the congeon flowrette abessie dyghte,
 Stondeth unhurte, unquaced bie the storme:
 Syke is a picte of lyffe; the man of myghte
 Is tempest-chaft, hys woe greate as hys forme;
 Thieselfe a flowrette of small account,
 WOULDST harder felle the wynde, as hygher
 thee dydste mounte.

Chatterton in the muniment room of Saint Mary Redcliffe, amidst his old vellum deeds and charters, deciphering the strange sentences, and copying the illuminations and heraldic devices with a skill that deceived none but Bristol pewterers and quack archæologists, who was he but the dim projection into the past of those other miraculous boys: John Keats, from whose pen flowed all the lustrous tints that painter's palette ever knew, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who both with pen and brush recreated the wonder and the loveliness of ancient days.

Turbulent old monarch of a realm long fled,
Old Sam, you are more pathetic than the dead
boy you shook your head so doubtfully over!
The modern world could part with you and what
you did far better than the youth, Thomas Chat-
terton! Your day was the night of the creative
spirit, but the sexton's boy was the twittering
firstling that wakes before the dawn, who sings
in the chill and the dark, and whose song, so
weak and preludal, serves in dying to awaken
the choir that celebrates the sunrise and the
clear day.

MINSTREL'S ROUNDDELAY

A Reprint from Poems of THOMAS CHATTERTON

O sing unto my roundelay,
O drop the briny tear with me,
Dance no more at holy-day,
Like a running river be.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

Black his locks as the winter night,
White his skin as the summer snow,
Red his face as the morning light,
Cold he lies in the grave below.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

Sweet his tongue as the throstle's note,
Quick in dance as thought can be,
Deft his tabor, cudgel stout,
O he lies by the willow-tree !
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

Hark ! the raven flaps his wing
In the briar'd dell below ;
Hark ! the death-owl loud doth sing
To the nightmares as they go.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

See ! the white moon shines on high
Whiter is my true love's shroud ;
Whiter than the morning sky,
Whiter than the evening cloud.

My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

Here upon my true love's grave
Shall the barren flowers be laid :
Not one holy Saint to save
All the coldness of a maid !
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

With my hands I'll gird the briars
Round his holy corse to grow.
Elfin Faëry, light your fires ;
Here my body still shall bow.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

Come, with acorn-cup and thorn,
Drain my hearte's blood away ;
Life and all its good I scorn,
Dance by night or feast by day.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

A DEFENSE OF POETRY

A Reprint from SHELLEY

We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes. There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least what is wiser and better than what men now practice and endure. But we let "*I dare not* wait upon *I would*, like the poor cat in the adage." We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having

enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labor, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam? Poetry, and the principle of Self of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world.

*

*MAN is a sociable being, and
falsehood is an evasion of the
duty and the delight of frank com-
munication.* DOWDEN'S *Montaigne.*

*

About Our Contributors

Edwin Wiley, graduate of the University of Tennessee, and student at Vanderbilt and Harvard Universities, is on the staff of the department of English at Vanderbilt University, and has charge of the Library. He is the author of "The Old and the New Renaissance: A Group of Studies in Literature and Art," and poems and articles contributed to various magazines.

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